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THE DETECTION OF PLATINUM THEFTS

At the St. Louis meeting of the American Chemical Society a communication was presented from Dr. W. F. Hillebrand regarding the apparently organized thefts of platinum ware that are taking place throughout the United States, with the suggestion that a committee be appointed to consider whether or not legislation might not be recommended to Congress which would assist in controlling the matter. The council voted that such a committee be appointed, and the president appointed R. B. Moore, of the Bureau of Mines, Washington, D. C., Chas. H. Kerk, of J. F. Bishop and Company, Malvern, Pa., and Geo. F. Kunz, of Tiffany and Company.

The news service of the American Chemical Society has issued a bulletin describing the arrest of two men while attempting to dispose of 280 troy ounces of platinum "sponge," the porous state of the metal. They had left small lots with two different firms who, having circulars concerning various thefts, notified the authorities. The Bureau of Standards last March had lost 73 ounces in the form of laboratory ware valued at nearly \$11,000, while in December, 1919, the Roessler and Hasslacher Company of Perth Amboy, had missed \$5,000 worth of the metal in the form of sponge. Several universities had also complained of platinum thefts.

The exact composition of definite consignments of platinum is fairly well known to chemists, the slight variations being due to traces of other substances, such as iridium. Chemical analysis indicated that the seized supply had come neither from the New Jersey plant nor from the laboratory of the Bureau of Standards. In its quality, it closely re-

sembled the stocks at the War Department plant in Nitro, West Virginia, where the inventory showed there should be 5,800 ounces of sponge, and also the stock of 13,800 ounces at a government military plant at Jacksonville, Tennessee. As some of the platinum at Nitro was known to contain a large percentage of palladium, that supposed to be stolen seemed to have come from Jacksonville. There the metal was of exceptional purity as it contained 99.58 per cent. of platinum, with slight traces of iridium, rhodium and iron. Its texture was uniform except that here and there were lumps of a yellowish brown substance, which on ignition yielded platinum sponge and gave off fumes of chlorine. It was learned that an order had been given at Jacksonville to turn back large quantities of platinum chloride into sponge. Then came a thorough search. In eighty-six cans in the safe was found a substance supposed to be platinum, which on examination proved to be a mixture of mercury with ordinary moist dirt.

RETIREMENT OF CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYEES

THE act providing for the retirement of civil service employees, including scientific men in the government service, is now effective. It applies to employees who have been in the classified service 15 or more years and who have reached the age of 70 years (65 years in the case of mechanics). Employees eligible for retirement are divided into six classes depending on length of service, and the maximum and minimum annuities in each class are specified by law, being contingent on the average annual basic salary for the last 10 years of service. The classes, maximum rates and annuities are as follows: